

# Workplace Safety and Hazards

## INTRODUCTION

Workplace safety is major part of every organisation. An organisation should ensure that all employees have a safe work environment to prevent any injury while on the job. Workplace accident, dispute, is a cost to the organisation as well as to the injured individuals and their families. In any organisation, every employee and the management is legally responsible to make it a safe workplace. Working together to ensure proper health and safety helps in improving the work environment and the productivity of the organisation, as employees take the responsibility for their own health and safety rather than depend on the 'safety officer' or management.

Risk management is a proactive process that helps in responding to change and facilitates continuous improvement in any business. It should be planned, systematic and cover all reasonably predictable hazards and associated risks.

As a customer service representative (CSR), one spends long hours in front of the computer using earphone and continue sitting on the chair. A CSR who habitually uses a computer as an important part of their work, come across certain occupational hazards.

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These hazards include health issues like back pain, eye strain and stress. In order to minimise the impact of occupational hazards, there are certain precautions that should be followed, which are as follows:

- Provide sufficient space for the CSR or the helpdesk operator to move comfortably.
- Provide lighting that is adequate with suitable contrast between the screen and background.
- Avoid glare and reflections on the screen.
- Have windows fitted with adjustable coverings to alter the sunlight level.
- Give enough space when a workstation is shared with more than one person.

An accident is an unplanned, uncontrolled, or unforeseen event resulting in injury or harm to people and damage to goods, such as a person falling down and getting injured or a glassware item breaking upon being knocked over. An emergency is a serious or crisis situation that needs immediate attention and action. For example, a sudden outbreak of fire in the organisation needs immediate attention.

## PREVENTION OF DISASTERS AND RISK EVENTS

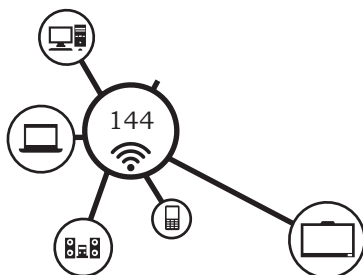
In relation to workplace safety and health, hazard can be defined as any source of potential harm or danger to someone or any adverse health effect produced under certain condition.

Many hazards and their associated risks are well known and have well-established and accepted control measures. In these situations, the second step to formally assess the risk is unnecessary. If, after identifying a hazard, you already know the risk and how to control it effectively, you can implement the controls without undertaking a risk assessment.

Some of the basic safety rules are as given below.

### Fire Safety

Employees should be aware of all emergency exits, including fire escape routes, of the office building and also the locations of fire extinguishers and alarms.



## Falls and Slips

To avoid falls and slips, all things must be arranged properly. Any spilt liquid, food or other items must be immediately cleaned to avoid any accidents. Make sure there is proper lighting and all damaged equipment, stairways and light equipment are repaired immediately.

## First Aid

Employees should know about the location of first aid kits in the office. First aid kits should be kept in places that can be reached quickly. These kits should contain all the important items for first aid, for example, all the things required to deal with common problems, such as cuts, burns, headaches or muscle cramps.

## Security

Employees should make sure that they keep their personal things in a safe place.

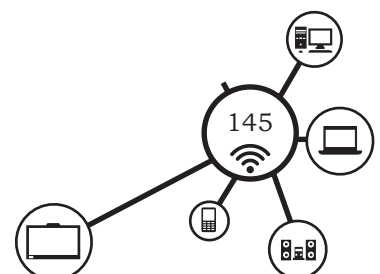
## Electrical Safety

Employees must be provided the basic knowledge of using electrical equipment and common problems. Employees must also be provided instructions about electrical safety, such as keeping water and food items away from electrical equipment. Electrical staff and engineers should carry out routine inspections of all wiring to make sure there are no damaged or broken wires.

## ACCIDENTS AND EMERGENCIES

Each organisation or chain of organisations has procedures and practices to handle and report accidents and take care of emergencies. Although you will find most of these procedures and practices common across the industry, some procedures might be modified to fit a particular type of business within the industry. For example, procedure to handle accidents caused by slipping or falling will be similar across the industry. You need to be aware of the general procedures and practices as well as the ones specific to your organisation.

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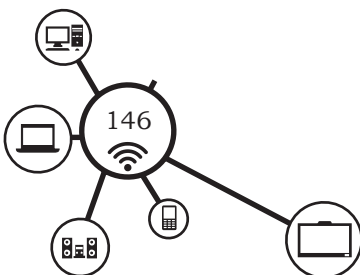


## NOTES

Following are some of the guidelines for identifying and reporting an accident or emergency:

- **Notice and correctly identify accidents and emergencies:** You need to be aware of what constitutes an emergency and what constitutes an accident in an organisation. The organisation's policies and guidelines will be the best guide in this matter. You should be able to accurately identify such incidents in your organisation. You should also be aware of the procedures to tackle each form of accident and emergency.
- **Get help promptly and in the most suitable way:** Follow the procedure for handling a particular type of accident and emergency. Promptly act as per the guidelines. Ensure that you provide the required help and support as laid down in the policies. Do not act outside the guidelines and policies laid down for your role even if your actions are motivated by the best intention. Remember that only properly trained and certified professionals may be authorised to take decisions beyond the organisation's policies and guidelines, if the situation requires.
- **Follow company policies and procedures for preventing further injury while waiting for help to arrive:** If someone is injured, do not act as per your impulse or gut feeling. Go as per the procedures laid down by your organisation's policy for tackling injuries. You need to stay calm and follow the prescribed procedures. If you panic or act outside the prescribed guidelines you may end up further aggravating the emergency situation or putting the injured person in further danger. You may even end up injuring yourself.
- **Act within the limits of your responsibility and authority when accidents and emergencies arise:** Provide help and support within your authorised limit. Provide medical help to the injured only if you are certified to provide the necessary aid. Otherwise, wait for the professionals to arrive and give necessary help. In case of emergencies also, act within your authorised limits and let the professionals do the

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task allocated to them. Do not attempt to handle any emergency situation for which you do not have formal training or authority. You may end up harming yourself and the people around you.

- **Promptly follow instructions given by the senior staff and the emergency services:** Provide necessary services as described by the organisation's policy for your role. Also, follow the instructions of senior staff that is trained to handle particular situations. Work under their supervision when handling accidents and emergencies.

## Types of Accidents

The following are some of the commonly occurring accidents in organisations:

- **Trip and fall:** Employees can trip on carelessly left loose material and fall down, such as tripping on loose wires, goods left on the aisles, elevated threshold. This type of accident may result in simple bruises to serious fractures.
- **Slip and fall:** People may lose foothold on the floor and stairs resulting in injuries. Slips are mainly due to wet floors.



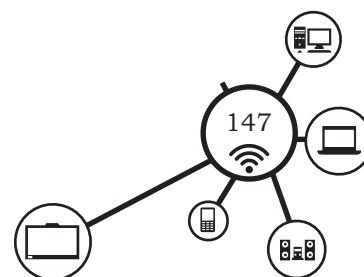
Fig.6.1: Commonly occurring accidents in organisations

## HANDLING ACCIDENTS

Try to avoid accidents in your organisation by finding out all the potential hazards and eliminating them. If a colleague in the organisation is not following safety practices and precautions, inform your supervisor or any other authorised personnel. Always remember that one person's careless action can harm the safety of many others in the organisation. In case of an injury to a colleague due to an accident in your organisation, you should do the following:

- Attend to the injured person immediately. Depending on the level and seriousness of the injury, see that the injured person receives first aid or medical help at the earliest. You can give medical treatment or first-aid to the injured person only if you are qualified to give such treatment. Let trained authorised people give first aid or medical treatment.

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- Inform your supervisor about the accident, giving details about the probable cause of the accident and a description of the injury.
- Assist your supervisor in investigating and finding out the actual cause of the accident. After identifying the cause of the accident, help your supervisor to take appropriate action to prevent similar accidents in future.

## HEALTH IN OCCUPATIONAL WORKSTATION

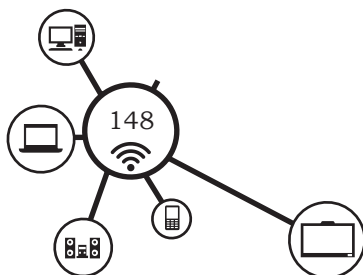
As per the World Health Organization (WHO), health is a “State of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” This means being healthy does not simply mean not being unhealthy — it also means you need to be at peace emotionally, and feel fit physically. For example, you cannot say you are healthy simply because you do not have any physical illness like a cold or cough. You also need to think about whether you are feeling calm, relaxed and happy.

Some common health issues are

- allergies,
- depression and anxiety and
- cough, cold and sore throat.

## Potential Sources of Hazards in an Organisation

- **Using computers:** Hazards include poor sitting postures or excessive duration of sitting in one position. These hazards may result in pain and strain. Making the same movement repetitively can also cause muscle fatigue. In addition, glare from the computer screen can be harmful to the eyes. Stretching at regular intervals or doing some simple yoga in your seat can mitigate such hazards.
- **Handling office equipment:** Improper handling of office equipment can result in injuries. For example, sharp-edged equipment if not handled properly, can cause cuts. Staff members should



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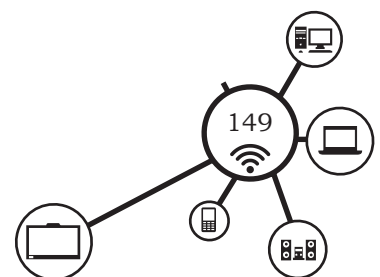
be trained to handle equipment properly. A relevant manual should be made available by the administration on handling equipment.

- **Handling objects:** Lifting or moving heavy items without proper procedure or techniques can be a source of potential hazard. Always follow approved procedure and proper posture for lifting or moving objects.
- **Stress at work:** In today's organisations, you may encounter various stress-causing hazards. Long working hours can be stressful and so can be aggressive conflicts or arguments with colleagues. Always look for ways for conflict resolution with colleagues. Have some relaxing hobbies for stress against long working hours.
  - (a) Mentally healthy workplaces benefit all employees, their families, organisations and the broader community.
  - (b) Mentally healthy workplaces promote wellbeing, minimise work place stress, and are environments where staff with poor mental health feel safe to talk about their condition, are supported and have equal opportunities.
  - (c) Everyone has a role to play in creating a mentally healthy workplace — it is a shared responsibility.
- **Working environment:** Potential hazards may include poor ventilation, chairs and tables of inappropriate height, hard furniture, poor lighting, staff unaware of emergency procedures, or poor housekeeping. Hazards may also include physical or emotional intimidation, such as bullying or ganging up against someone. The staff should be made aware of organisation's policies to fight against all the given hazards related to a working environment.

## General Evacuation Procedures

Each organisation has its own evacuation procedures listed in its policies. An alert employee, who is well-informed about evacuation procedures, can not only save themselves, but also help others in case of

## NOTES



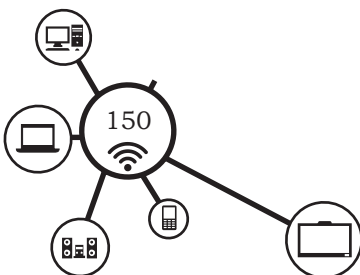
an emergency. Therefore, you should be aware of these procedures and follow them properly during an emergency evacuation. Read your organisation's policies to know about the procedures endorsed by it. In addition, here are a few general evacuation steps that will always be useful in such situations:

- Leave the premises immediately and start moving towards the nearest emergency exit.
- If possible, assist any person with disability to move towards the emergency exit. However, do not try to carry anyone unless you are trained to do so.
- Keep yourself light when evacuating the premises. You may carry your hand-held belongings, such as a bag or briefcase as you move towards the emergency exit. However, do not come back into the building to pick up your belongings unless the area is declared safe.



Fig. 6.3: Some of the Common Safety Signs

- Do not use escalators or elevators (lifts) to avoid overcrowding and getting trapped, in case there is a power failure. Use the stairs instead.



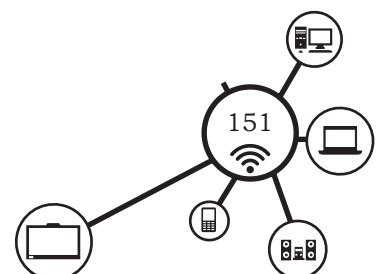


- Go to the emergency assembly area. Check if any of your colleagues is missing and immediately inform the personnel in charge of emergency evacuation or your supervisor.
- Do not go back to the building that you have evacuated till you are informed by authorised personnel that it is safe to go inside.
- After discussing the course content, ask candidates to prompt the key points on their understanding of the evacuation procedures at their current organisation.

### Safety Guidelines Checklist

- Shut down all machines before leaving for the day.
- Do not use equipment if it smokes, sparks or looks unsafe.
- Do not smoke in 'No Smoking' areas.
- Report any unsafe condition or acts to your supervisor. These could include:
  - Slippery floors
  - Missing entrance and exit signs
  - Poorly lit stairs
  - Loose handrails or guard rails
  - Loose, open or broken windows
  - Dangerously piled supplies or equipment
  - Unlocked doors and gates
  - Electrical equipment left operating
  - Open doors on electrical panels
  - Blocked corridors
  - Blocked fire extinguishers
  - Blocked fire doors
  - Smoke in non-smoking areas
  - Roof leaks
  - Safety devices not operating properly

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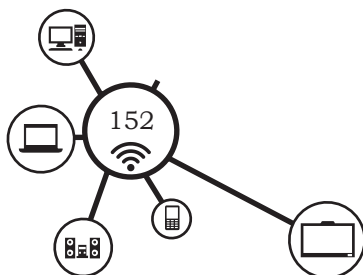


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## Check Your Progress

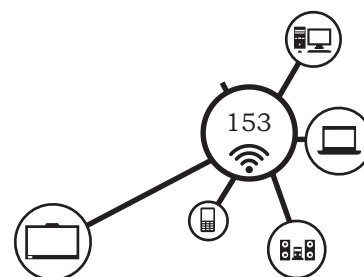
### A. State whether the following statements are True or False

1. The employer and employees are responsible for workplace safety.
2. Any injury at work should be reported to the supervisor immediately.
3. No matter how big or small the injury; the injured person should receive medical attention.
4. While working with machines and equipment, employees must follow the safety guidelines set by the company.
5. At any office, the first aid kit should always be available for use in an emergency.
6. It is optional to participate in random fire drills conducted by the offices from time-to-time.
7. The 'Wet Floor' sign is not needed and causes problems for people.
8. It is okay to place heavy and light items on the same shelf.
9. There is no need to train employees on how to use the fire extinguisher. They can operate extinguishers following the instruction written on the extinguisher case, when needed.
10. The cleaning supplies, especially chemical products, can be left in the bathrooms or in any of the cupboards in the office.
11. An accident is a serious or crisis situation that needs immediate attention and action.
12. Emergency procedures have been devised to keep everyone safe.
13. A hazard is any situation that has the potential to cause injury, illness or death.
14. If no notification is made of an injury sustained, compensation can be obtained.
15. To reduce injury, a risk control process accompanied by hazard-management procedures needs to be established.
16. Safety signs can prevent accidents.
17. The duty of care at the workplace is the responsibility of the employer only.
18. When providing a safe working environment for the staff, employers must eliminate all risks to health and safety.



### B. Multiple choice questions

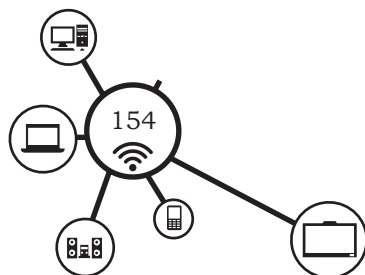
1. Which of the following are appropriate actions for handling accidents and emergencies? Select the two correct actions.
  - (a) You should give medical treatment or first-aid to the injured even if you are not properly trained in such procedures because such treatments should be given promptly.
  - (b) Take decisions beyond the organisation's policies and guidelines if the situation requires.
  - (c) Get help promptly and in the most suitable way.
  - (d) Follow instructions given by senior staff and the emergency services.
2. What is the first action to take when approaching the scene of an accident?
  - (a) Check for signs of life.
  - (b) Wait for the emergency services.
  - (c) Attend to the most serious injury.
  - (d) Make sure the area is safe to enter.
3. What does a risk assessment tell you?
  - (a) How to report accidents.
  - (b) The working hours of the organisation.
  - (c) Where the first aid box is and the first-aiders.
  - (d) How to do the job safely.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ have a duty to work safely under the Health and Safety at Work Act, etc.
  - (a) Employers only
  - (b) Employees only
  - (c) The general public
  - (d) All people at work
5. What is a hazard?
  - (a) Anything with the potential to cause harm.
  - (b) Where an accident is likely to cause harm.
  - (c) The likelihood of something going wrong.
  - (d) An accident waiting to happen.
6. Accidents are best prevented by \_\_\_\_\_.
  - (a) the Health and Safety Executive.
  - (b) employers inspecting workplaces.
  - (c) people being aware of hazards and working in a safe manner.
  - (d) the Managing Director.



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### C. Match the columns

Type of Emergency	Example
A. Medical	a. Earthquake
B. Substance	b. An expectant mother in labour
C. Structural	c. Chemical spills
D. Security	d. Power failure
E. Natural disaster	e. Armed robbery



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